How Geraldine Farrar Lost 50 Pounds

The Suit of Silver Armor That Made the Grand Opera Prima Donna Build Up to Carry It As Joan of Arc and the Mysterious Pills—(One Pink, One White)—That Scaled Her Down Again From the Maid's Husky Weight

Two Studies of Prima Donna Farrar Before and After. At the Right the Strong Armed, Full Cheeked, Fat Shouldered Phase as Joan of Arc; at the Left the Charming Lean and "Jowl-less" Contours of Her Face and Her Sloping Shoulders When She Had Lost Her Surplus Weight.

Geraldine Farrar After She Lost Her Fifty Pounds and Geraldine in the Maid of Orleans Armor That She Plumped Up to Carry Comfortably.

IN one short year Geraldine Farrar, the internationally admired prima donna of the Metropolitan Grand Opera, has deliberately put on and as deliberately taken off fifty pounds of very fair flesh.

Through this unusual feat Miss Farrar stands as a lesson both for those who have too little and want more and those who have too much and desire less. Some women have made themselves plump in a year; some have made themselves thin—but heretofore none is known to the annals of science to have accomplished both in the twelve months. Putting on and taking off flesh as readily as one puts on or takes off a coat is something distinctly new.

Most of all is she a beacon of hope to opera lovers who have grown weary of seeing starving Mimis dying of consumption in La Boheme and weighing 200 pounds and more while passing away; or of Marguerites supposed to be wasting away in prison and looking like the corn-fed heroines of the heroic past; tired, too, of Brunhildas who really ought to be heavy ladies but who look like the before taking exhibits of dyspepsia nostrums.

What a comfort, what a conservation of illusion and ideals it would be to have opera singers who could dress their skeletons for their roles just as they dress their bodies for those same interpretations.

Most grand opera singers do not seem to care whether they look their parts or not. But Miss Farrar does not think that a voice alone can carry a part, nor that, off the operatic stage, acting alone can carry it, either. The image in the eye of the beholder seems to her as important as the song in the ear.

Miss Farrar had what might be called a medium figure. She was able to wear the diaphanous veilings of a Camille and look as though she were really wasting away. At the same time she could put on the more husky garments of the unhappy Queen in "The Love of the Three Kings" and still appear neither too heavy nor too light.

But from the operatic stage Miss Farrar descended into motion pictures. She became there a Joan of Arc. The main costume of Joan is a suit of silvered armor. Now if this armor had been on the operatic stage it would have been cleverly silvered paper mache and of no particular weight. But the motion picture camera is a fiend for reality. The suit Miss Farrar had to wear was not real silver, but it was silvered metal, and when she put it on she felt her shoulders sag and her knees bend and a general and painful feeling of carrying a load greater than she could bear.

And no wonder, for the armor weighed exactly eighty pounds!

To carry around eighty pounds upon one and be as swift and full of gestures and as light upon her feet as necessary developed into a very serious problem for Miss Farrar. Joan could have carried eighty pounds and probably twice that without flinching—but she was a country-bred girl used to hard work. Miss Farrar is more or less a hot-house product like all the modern opera prima donnas. Her muscles were not used to any such weight as this. In the heaviest of her roles the heaviest of her garments, taken in all, probably did not aggregate more than fifteen pounds. The heaviest of her coats and street apparel would not amount to more than twenty-five pounds.

In her picture the prima donna had to lead her troops, inspire them to action by her own heroism, scale walls, jump moats and so on and so on. The average person would find it difficult to frisk and frolic about with a forty-pound sack of flour on their backs. Imagine, then, the difficulty with two such burdens. Miss Farrar had to pose for at least six weeks, and there would be takes and retakes. Yet she could bear the weight of that armor only a few minutes at a time!

There was only one thing to do—grow up to the armor.

Miss Farrar began to exercise. Also she ate all the things she liked—gravies and puddings, bread and butter and sweets. She ate whenever she was hungry and a little oftener. She slept nine hours a day at least. In a month she fitted the inside of the armor at every point, and was able to act in it for two hours at a time without the slightest fatigue or discomfort. And as the days went on she could have gone, if necessary, like the ancient knights, for days on end without changing her clothes.

There came the first private showing of the picture, and, incidentally, the first time that Miss Farrar had seen how the camera portrayed her. It was Bobbie Burns who mourned—

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us.'

Few of us know how we look. Even the sight of ourselves in our mirrors does not show us—and this is proven by the fact that when we approach a mirror, not knowing that it is a mirror, the image that we see therein seems to be that of a perfect stranger, and it is with a distinct shock that at last we realize that the strange person who seemed to be someone else, is really ourselves. When that happens the strangeness vanishes and the reflected figure is covered over with the illusion again of our own conception of ourselves.

But the motion picture is different. Therein the actors do, literally, see themselves as others see them, and when Miss Farrar saw herself she gasped.

Could that be actually her face, so broad, with a suspicion of jowls? Were those high, fat shoulders hers? That mountainous chest and those husky arms Geraldine's? Unquestionably they were. Miss Farrar was seeing herself as others saw her.

Visions of her operatic roles flashed through her mind—the fat Mimis that she detested, the overplumped Madame Butterflies whose efforts to touch the floor with their foreheads were so humorously pathetic, and who were in constant danger of rolling over like a ball every time they sank to their knees. Could it be that she had joined the ranks? Her eyes told her that she certainly had.

She had grown up to Joan of Arc's armor. Now she had to go back to the gauzes of Camille and the thin silks of Butterfly. How could she do it—and quickly?

It happened that afternoon Laura Hope Crewes, a lovely leading woman who had been very plump and grown less so, called on Miss Farrar. The prima donna stated her problem. Miss Crewes mentioned a specialist well known to stage and society folk; the one, indeed, who had thinned down ex-President Cleveland 105 pounds in one year. She called upon him. "I won't diet, for I must keep my strength, and I won't exercise any more, because see what it has done to me. I want to be lithe and thin and willowy again."

"Who asked you to exercise?" she said he asked. He prescribed the twin pills, white and pink, and told her to take them each night and report to him. That was all. On July 31 she stepped diffidently upon the weighing scales. She knew she could wear the same clothes she did before she expanded into Joan. But—her doubts ended when her fascinated eyes followed the register of the scales. She had weighed 185 pounds. She weighed 139 pounds!

To the writer of this article Miss Farrar declared that she had never been better in her life. She had experienced no discomfort, had not been ill for a moment. She maintained her new weight. In fact, it diminished by four pounds. She still takes the pink and white pills when there are signs of increasing girth or weight. Within the year she had gained and lost fifty pounds.

"My strength has not been in the least lessened. The treatment is harmless. I am an exceedingly active being. I am up and about at six in the morning and don't stop until twelve, and I love it. Energy is life."

But while Miss Farrar felicitates herself and her friends felicitate her upon the coup, there are memories of others who have rid themselves of many pounds and deplore it.

Not all remedies for reducing obesity seem to turn out well. Louise Dresser took a fat cure and suffered from impaired health. After her experience she said:

"I will never take another internal remedy for fat. Not if I weigh 400 pounds and am as big as a house."

Harry Woodruff, the handsome perennial juvenile actor had a serious illness which he attributed to a fat cure which he had taken. He died about a year later. Whatever the drugs were that Woodruff took he always attributed to them the wrecking of his health.

Explaining his ideas about obesity, the doctor who treated Miss Farrar said:

"I hold that not even a man six feet tall should weigh over 185 pounds. If he does, some organ is at fault or his condition is the cause. He or she who is emaciated suffers from some abnormal condition of the organs of elimination. Such disease is the cause, just the same as it is with fat people. One physical condition causes emaciation, another fat.

"The first essential thing by which the mode of treatment must be determined in every case is the state of the kidneys. The means of cure must be regulated by the healthfulness or debility of those vital organs. There are three important causes of obesity. The first is artificial heat, the second is sleep, and the third, and above all, an abnormal condition of the kidneys. The last is the essential factor.

"Lethargy, drowsiness and sleep are potential factors. Never nap. Never sleep over seven hours, and, if you reduce that number to six, all the better. Sleep is simply the relaxation of the muscles and nerves—then only sleep in moderation, as well as exercise. Indolence of mind and somnolence of body are always associated with obesity. Sleep always superinduces obesity when indulged in to excess.

"Women in Oriental countries when in preparation for being made the prides of the harem are made to sleep as much as possible. They are not allowed to walk about, are forced to drink olive oil; are fattened up with figs, sugar cane and palm oil nuts, and, above all, they take warm baths.

"To reduce my fat patients I always insist on their living and sleeping in cool rooms, never putting a superabundance of covers on them at night, and especially avoiding dressing in clothes of too great warmth.

"I wish to forcibly impress upon you that I have no faith in dieting unless overeating is the cause. Similia similibus treatment is often necessary. Diet at no time unless you believe that excessive eating is the foundation of your obese troubles. There are occasions when dieting is actually no good, for excessive dieting may be the cause.

"As most fat people want to follow a diet, whatever I may urge to the contrary, I will suggest a small bill of fare.

DIETING MENU.

BREAKFAST—One cup of tea or coffee, with milk or sugar, six ounces; three slices of stale bread or three ounces butter, 1 ounce; two eggs, or two or three ounces of either meat or fish.

DINNER—Meat or fish, eight ounces; vegetables, such as spinach, cabbage, string beans, asparagus, tomatoes or beet tops, and farinaceous food, rice, hominy, etc., four ounces; salad, with plain dressing, two ounces; fruit ad libitum; wines, hock or claret, in moderation.

SUPPER OR LUNCH—Two eggs or lean meat, six ounces; salad, radishes or pickles, one ounce; one slice of stale bread or one ounce; fruit, four ounces; light wines in moderation.

"My advice is that you exercise in moderation. Easy walking is the best of all. But don't overdo it. When tired stop right away, for it then becomes work and not exercise.

"Nothing is gained in the end by the usual sweating and dieting systems. As a reduction takes place your physique becomes different from what it was. As certain organs undergo great changes gradually so from time to time the treatment should correspond. Violent exercise creates an unnatural desire for food and drink. What you have lost in weight the adipose cells at once glean from the return to the former quantities of solids and liquids necessary to appease the ravenous appetite.

"Thus the don't-eat-this and the don't-eat-that theory of dieting cannot meet with approval, for in the end nothing is gained thereby. Once more I repeat, that when you must eat after dieting your fat is all back and more, too, in an abnormal condition.

"It is possible to reduce or put on any one, 100 pounds in weight. I have done it with several. A physician has to watch the organs, note their action and handle his patients as he finds them and do it right. From my experience I would say that about a year would not be too long a time to reduce or put on 100 pounds. To do it properly, ten to twelve pounds a month are a fair average."